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Passing

JESUS' CIRCUMCISION AND STRATEGIC SELF-SACRIFICE

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Small Sacrifices

In a refutation of Christians who denied Christ's fleshly reality, Tertullian luxuriated in the incarnational impossibilities of God's death: "The son of God was crucified; it is no shame, since it must be shameful. And the son of God died: it is believable, since it is absurd. And having been buried, he rose again: it is certain, since it is impossible."¹ Not only the indignities of death, but those of birth attracted Tertullian: "What's more unworthy of God? What is more blushworthy [*erubescendum*]: to be born, or to die? To bear flesh, or the cross? To be circumcised, or crucified [*suffigi*]? To be in a cradle, or a coffin? To be laid down in a manger, or laid to rest in a tomb?"² At the beginning of his life as at the end, Christ sacrifices the power of his divinity to the sorrows of the flesh.

As Virginia Burrus has noted, "Tertullian's christological aesthetics links nativity tightly to mortality."³ Indeed, as Tertullian writes, "there is no flesh without nativity,"⁴ and therefore Christ's self-sacrifice must acquire a certain specificity: he possesses not just generic "flesh," but flesh formed in a particular time and place. So, in the list of blush-worthy sorrows suffered by Christ, we find paired together circumcision and crucifixion: the shedding of blood at the beginning of life and the end. Circumcision, of course, was not a universal or random moment of childhood suffering: it marks Jesus' life of human travail as a *Jewish* life, and his blush-worthy travails as particularly Jewish.

That Tertullian should signal this self-sacrificing Jewishness through circumcision is not, I think, incidental or driven by the rhetorical need to find a suitably surgical counterpart to the crucifixion.⁵ The hard reality and substantiality of this mark, combined with what it does (and does not) signify, afford us a unique vantage point on the early Christian understanding of precisely what (and why) Jesus gave up in the incarnation. That Christianity internalized and reimagined the concept

of sacrifice in the *crucifixion* of Jesus is clear enough: “Christianity defined itself precisely as a religion centered on sacrifice,” Guy Stroumsa has written, “even if it was a reinterpreted sacrifice. The Christian *anamnēsis* was the reactivation of the sacrifice of the Son of God, performed by the priests.”⁶ It is my suggestion here that, in crucial ways, early Christians could look upon the entire incarnation itself as a kind of sacrifice, drawing not simply on discourses of religious ritual but on broader images of power and personhood in the ancient world. My use of the term *sacrifice*, then, differs in many ways from that of the other contributors to this volume (as became clear during the conference at Boston University during which I first presented this work). My scope widens out from the focus on “ritual slaughter” that animates the fine contributions herein to consider the sacrifice of Jesus visible not only on the cross but in his particular human body.

The cultural context in which Christians imagined Jesus sacrificing his divinity and descending into a demeaning and impossible carnality—literally marked as Jewish by his circumcision—was one in which identities emerged out of and were contested in the crucible of discipline and mastery, of self and others. The power of Rome itself was created out of the use—and, often, abuse—of others’ bodies: slaves, provincials, women, soldiers, and so on, without which sacrifice Rome could not function. But this sacrifice of other persons was also internalized, engendering a sense of slippery *self*-discipline and *self*-mastery: Roman gentlemen had to train their bodies rigorously to appear naturally masculine;⁷ Roman nobles had to sacrifice leisure—negate *otium*—to take up the duties of public life.⁸ It would make sense to an ancient Roman audience, then, to envision Jesus as part of what Carlin Barton has called Rome’s “emotional economy of sacrifice”:⁹ “an elaborate physics of binding, capturing, taming, and domesticating energy with the purpose of enhancing and concentrating it,” a physics which included all manner of self-sacrifice as well.¹⁰ Not only the bodies of victims made visible this cultural dynamism, but all bodies located in and operating along the pathways of this “emotional economy” felt the sting of sacrifice, of ceding, of “giving up” of oneself. So we must imagine the sacrifice of Jesus not only on the cross, but in his particular material existence as well.

We can see this view of Jesus’ incarnation as a daily sacrifice, the dynamic pull of this “emotional economy,” in the ways Christians imagined his Judaized, circumcised body. Jesus’ Jewish circumcision was demeaning: a mark of opprobrium that Jesus took upon himself willingly, like the shameful marks of crucifixion. Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, admits to his Jewish interlocutor that Christ was circumcised, and immediately adds this context: “Likewise I confess that he underwent fatal crucifixion and that he became a human being and that he suffered as many things as those members of your people arranged for him.”¹¹ Crucifixion and circumcision alike were moments that located Jesus squarely, even sacrificially, among the Jews.

Yet on Christ’s body, the divine suffering of circumcision—like that of crucifixion—underwent a strange transformation, from *skandalon* to *sotēria*. Orthodox Christians

were clear on three points: (1) Jesus was truly, physically, *Jewishly* circumcised; (2) this circumcision played a particular role in his condescension to human form, particularly among Jews; (3) finally, as a consequence of this specific birth and life among Jews, followers of Christ are utterly and absolutely distinct from Jews and Judaism. The logical shift from the first two points to the third point are only possible because the Christians I'm discussing viewed Christ's human existence—his Jewish existence—in a particular way. Although these early Christians viewed Jesus' earthly existence—his suffering, his self-sacrifice, his condescension to Judaism—as inescapably *real*, they also understood it to be ultimately strategic, even misleading. I suggest we might describe Jesus' self-sacrificing Jewish life on earth (as it was understood by early Christians) using the language of *passing*.

Passing emerged as a distinct narrative of racial camouflage in U.S. literature of the nineteenth century, when "race" as a category acquired its patina of scientific inevitability.¹² Accounts of passing primarily portrayed a black individual "passing" for white, reinforcing the binary nature of U.S. racial politics;¹³ but "passing" has been read into a diverse array of deceptive identities, encompassing race, class, gender, religion, and sexuality.¹⁴ Narratives of passing destabilize an existing "optical economy of identity."¹⁵ That is, passing both undermines and necessitates the recognition of stable, mutually exclusive categories of personhood (categories of race, gender, sexuality, and so on). Passing emerges in social settings that rely on what Amy Robinson and others have called "specular identification":¹⁶ the interior qualities of a person must be, in some way, legible on the body's surface, conveying deeper, more ingrained and essential aspects of identity.

To "pass" from one category to another, therefore, calls that link between exterior surface and interior essence into question. How meaningful can "white" be as an essential category if a black person can mimic it so perfectly as to "pass"? How meaningful can "black" be as an essential category if a black woman—as philosopher and artist Adrian Piper recounted in a 1992 essay—has to remind or even insist to friends and colleagues that she is not "really" white?¹⁷ The pass over the racial boundary calls that boundary—and the essential categories it supposedly divides—into question. Yet in the logic of passing, those essences are also paradoxically affirmed: the notion of interior essence is never evaporated, it is temporarily dissociated from the surface of the passer's skin. To successfully pass *as* white, the "real person" (underneath? within?) must—somehow, in some fashion—remain *not* white, or else they are not "passing."¹⁸ As Elaine Ginsberg writes in her introduction to a collection of essays on the subject, "One cannot pass for something one *is not* unless there is some other, prepassing identity that one *is*."¹⁹ Valerie Rohy in the same collection concurs, "[P]assing insists on the 'truth' of racial identity . . . framing its resistance to essentialism in the very rhetoric of essence and origin."²⁰ Passing creates a situation in which the building blocks of identity are revealed to be a fantasy: constantly under invention, but still powerful and even "real" in their way.²¹

In many ways, Jesus is obviously a figure who "passes." In several varieties of early Christianity, he is a divine figure "passing" for human. Those Christians,

labeled “docetists” by their opponents, even believed that all of Jesus’ material existence was a deception, a mirage that perfectly fooled all but the elect.²² In this they both destabilized the boundary between human and divine—allowing those elect to cross over—and yet locked it firmly into place. Those Christians who eventually became the triumphant “orthodox” also believed that Christ “who was in the form of God” nonetheless “took the form of a servant” and was “born in the likeness of humanity” (Phil 2:6–7). Jesus’ human passing here too reaffirms the essential natures of “humanity” and “divinity” even as it confounds them.

Arguably, Jesus is unique in his ability to be God and “pass” for human in early Christian thought. Nonetheless, Jesus’ unique ability to be *both-and* and *neither-nor* expanded outward in antiquity to provide a template for the increasingly complex production of interlocking, contradictory identities known as “Christianity.” Jesus’ sacrifice of self—literal, physical, cultural, and even ethnic—creates for Christians the opportunity to rethink the power politics of their culture, to appropriate the power of a self that is created, fractured, even sacrificed, but never lost or powerless. When Christians contemplated Jesus circumcised, they identified with this impossible personhood, straddling essential, unchangeable identities that could shift, mutate, and incorporate their “other” opposites.

Christians understood that Christ’s circumcision must have been deliberate—even as an infant, after all, Jesus was still God—and it must be meaningful. Its meaning, however, could *not* be precisely the same meaning that attached to routine, non-Jesus-related Jewish circumcision. Not precisely the same meaning, but necessarily related: there was no question that his circumcision took place “under the Law”—that is, because of the Jewish covenant—and yet did not *make* Jesus Jewish. What did that circumcision accomplish? It functioned, I suggest, as the surface sign that allowed Jesus to *pass* as Jewish: it was his white skin, his American accent, his macho swagger, his visible—yet deceptive—Jewishness.

Jesus’ docetic Jewishness is a feature of this larger project on the circumcision of Christ that I often have to explain to people who don’t work in ancient Christianity, especially—interestingly—to contemporary Christians. Surely, I am told, Jesus was circumcised because he was Jewish! Bart Ehrman even said so, in his popular 1999 book on the historical Jesus:

There’s probably no reason to belabor the point that all of our sources portray Jesus as Jewish—he came from a Jewish home, he was circumcised as a Jew, he worshiped the Jewish God, he kept Jewish customs, followed the Jewish Law, interpreted the Jewish Scriptures, and so on. . . . [T]he tradition of Jesus’ Jewish origin and upbringing is firmly entrenched in all of our traditions at every level.²³

This assertion relies on modern notions of historical reconstruction, on a “historical Jesus” who did not exist in this way for ancient Christians. For these Christians, Jesus was God, incarnate *among* Jews. He passed as human, and he did so in a perfect Jewish disguise.

Jesus Passing

Let's return to Tertullian, whose treatise on Christ's flesh so memorably linked nativity, carnality, mortality, and self-sacrifice. "How could he be admitted to the synagogue," Tertullian asked in the early third century, "so out-of-nowhere, and entirely unknown?"²⁴ Tertullian was writing against what he perceived as the extremist position of Marcion, whose followers did not think Christ had anything to do with Jews and Judaism other than geographic coincidence: Christ simply appeared one day from heaven in the middle of Galilee.²⁵ Tertullian finds laughable the idea that Jesus could walk unmolested among the Jews without appropriate cover: "No one knowing his tribe, his people, his house [. . .]? Certainly they would have remembered, if they did not know that he was circumcised, that he should not be admitted into the holiest places [*sancta sanctorum*]!"²⁶ For Tertullian, Jesus' circumcision functions like his genealogy, which also appears in the Gospel of Luke and also is not quite what a proper, Jewish genealogy should be (it does not, of course, actually recount *Jesus'* physical descent, but his stepfather's). These pieces of camouflage enable Jesus' admission into the Jewish "holiest places"; they guarantee him a seat at the table in the synagogue. And what does Jesus do in the synagogue according to Tertullian? "He offers first to the Israelites the bread of his own teaching."²⁷

We often find Christ "passing" as Jewish for this reason: to bring his teaching to the Jews. And, frequently, his circumcision is explained as enabling this Jewish mission. In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Ambrose of Milan claimed (borrowing a line from the apostle Paul): "He was fashioned [*factus est*] under the Law so that he might win those who were under the Law" (cf. Gal 4:4).²⁸ That this "fashioning" was more fashion than fact Ambrose makes clear later in his commentary. Once again he borrows from Paul, this time reassigning—and reimagining—Paul's missionary self-description:

For those who are under the Law, as if he himself were under the Law (although he is not under the Law), he was circumcised, so that he might acquire those who are under the Law. But for those who were apart from the Law, he dined in fellowship with them, so that he might acquire those who lived apart from the Law. He was made weak for the weak through bodily suffering, so that he might acquire them. Afterwards he was made all things for all people: poor for the poor, rich for the rich, weeping for the weeping, hungry for the hungry, thirsty for the thirsty, flowing forth with abundance [*profluus abundantibus*].²⁹

Jesus, like Paul (1 Cor 9:20–22), came "as if under the Law, although not under the Law," and the circumcision was—apparently—part of this Jewish disguise by which he could give up a part of himself in order to win those "under the Law." (The strategy for winning gentiles involved the less physically challenging "dining in fellowship.")

Jesus was (again, like Paul) “all things for all people”; or, more precisely, he *seemed* to be all things for all people. Ambrose understands that Jesus came to initiate a particular and specific economy of salvation that would ultimately exclude those Jews he sacrificed so much to “win.”³⁰ A century later, Maximus of Turin imagines the same rationale for the circumcision: “so that the Jewish people, brought up in circumcision [*alumna circumcisionis plebs Iudaica*] would not reject him as a foreigner.”³¹ Circumcision enables a disguise, one designed to dupe the Jews into hearing Jesus out.

To understand the trickiness of Christ’s disguise, we must realize that it was predominantly anti-Jewish Christians who conceived of Jesus “passing” as Jewish in this manner; that is, an undercurrent of these protestations that Jesus came to “win” the Jews was the understanding that these Jews were not to be won.³² There were, to be sure, Christians who celebrated Jesus’ circumcision and viewed it as a model for their own behavior. The so-called orthodox referred to these Christians as “Ebionites,” and modern scholarship has dubbed them “Jewish-Christians.”³³ According to their fourth-century detractor Epiphanius of Salamis, they claimed the precedent of both the patriarchs of the Old Testament and Christ in the New Testament as warrant for their continued practice of circumcision. “Christ,” we are told they claimed, “was circumcised, so you should be circumcised!”³⁴ From the orthodox perspective, however, the Ebionites have been duped: they are successfully fooled by Christ’s Jewish passing, to the point where they emulate his disguise and think it is real.

Epiphanius, however, is not so fooled: he knows that Christ’s circumcision gave him a Jewish appearance, but meant something else. It was, he insists, entirely real: “he set things up,” Epiphanius writes, “so that he would be truly circumcised, and not merely in appearance, on the eighth day.” His disguise, in other words, was perfect. But in Epiphanius’s refutation of the Ebionites we begin to see why this disguise was perpetrated at all. Ambrose had said that Jesus came “like” a Jew to win the Jews. Epiphanius is a bit more precise:

[He was circumcised] in order to affirm that the circumcision which had been given in ancient times was justly ordained until his own arrival, and so that the Jews would not have any defense [*ἀπολογία*]. For if he were not circumcised, they would have been able to say, “We cannot accept an uncircumcised messiah.”³⁵

Epiphanius repeats a little further on: “Having perfect humanity, he was circumcised, arranging everything truly, so that the Jews, as I said before, would be defenseless [*ἀναπολόγητοι*].”³⁶ Epiphanius makes explicit what is only implicit in Tertullian, Ambrose, or Maximus: Jesus may have come to “win” the Jews and fashioned the perfect disguise to get the job done, but the Jews *still* rejected him (and continue to do so). The division between Jew and Christian, even when muddled on Christ’s own body, ultimately reasserts itself.

Part of the paradoxical logic of passing in modern accounts is the affirmation of essentialism: “black” and “white” are destabilized by racial passing, but affirmed as

“real” categories of race (to and from which one can pass). The Jewish passing of Jesus engineers the same confusion and reaffirmation of categories: “as if under the Law, but not under the Law,” Ambrose wrote. “In the circumcision justly given until his own arrival,” Epiphanius affirmed. Jesus’ circumcision is unquestionably Jewish—so Jewish even the Jews are fooled!—and in this way his act both recognizes and affirms the category of “Jew,” as distinct from Christian. And yet his disguise is *so* perfect, *so* admirable that our Christian authors must take care to point out what every good Christian should already recognize: it is a ruse.

After all, some *Christians* are being fooled as well, thinking that Jesus came not just to “fulfill the Law”—which, for orthodox Christians contemplating the circumcision, means he “paid it in full,” rendering its actual practice unnecessary.³⁷ These “heretical” Christians have themselves become “dupes,” believing they can maintain the strange admixture of essences they believe to be present on Jesus’ earthly body: faithful to the Law and members of the Christian community. Of course, our evidence for these Ebionites in antiquity is slim, almost entirely reliant on the obsessive, persistent detractions of their enemies. We might even posit that the Ebionite Christian *desire* for “the other” is really a projection of orthodox desires: it is, after all, Epiphanius who elaborates in such detail the perfect Jewishness of Jesus’ circumcision “under the Law.”³⁸ Epiphanius uses his refutation of the too-Jewish Ebionites to work out his own desire for and fear of the Jewish other: Christ’s “passing” then provides a model for Epiphanius as well, who can get inside and understand Judaism even as he repudiates it.³⁹ Christ’s circumcised body allows Epiphanius to gauge the narrow (and illusory) distance between self and other, Jew and Christian, to locate himself, like Christ, momentarily in that “in-between” space where the fantasy of Christian identity is, for a second, unveiled.

By the fifth century, most Christians seemed comfortable with understanding Jesus’ self-sacrifice as a strategy, part of his economy of salvation (and condemnation). Cyril of Alexandria, the great Christological theologian of the early fifth century—who also deployed violence against the Jews and pagans of his city—makes clear in an early treatise that Jesus was not, in fact, quite Jewish:

You might rightly be amazed at this: that he [Christ] of necessity came down from above into the land of Judea, among those by whom he was mocked impiously; there he was born according to the flesh. But, in truth, he wasn’t a Jew, insofar as he was the Word [καίτοι κατὰ ἀληθείαν Ἰουδαῖος οὐκ ὢν ὁ Λόγος], but rather from both heaven and his father.⁴⁰

Cyril comments in a later *Commentary on Luke*:

He is circumcised on the eighth day along with Jews [μετὰ Ἰουδαίων], so that he may confirm his kinship [τὴν συγγένειαν]. For the messiah [Christ] was expected from the seed of David, and he offered the proof of his kinship. For if even though he was circumcised they said, “We do not know where he comes

from” [John 9:29], had he not been circumcised according to the flesh, and kept the Law, their denial would have had just cause [πρόφασιν εὐλογον].⁴¹

Here the logic of Jesus’ passing—essential, yet illusory—is fully articulated: Christ was circumcised in “kinship” with the Jews, but his submission to their Law was a strategy, a means of defusing future Jewish critique. Cyril and his audience know that, in fact, the Jews—Christ’s own “kin”—*did* proclaim (unjustly, we now learn) that they did not know “where he comes from” (cf. Matt 13:55 and parallels). The Jews are fooled—they think Christ is their kin—but only to their detriment: their rejection forever severs a kinship that only existed contingently, temporarily, passingly, on Jesus’ body.

“Seen and Unseen”

Passing narratives are compelling because of the triangular tension they create: between the passer, the “dupe,” and the knowing gaze of a third viewer (the reader, the narrator, or a character within the narrative) who can see through the pass. Ebionites and Jews are both “dupes,” responding inappropriately to Jesus’ seeming Jewishness: Ebionites embrace his disguise, Jews reject him despite it. Christians like Ambrose, Epiphanius, or Cyril, on the other hand, see through the disguise to the deeper truth.

In this, Christians were arrogating to themselves a particularly Roman power and playing with a peculiarly Roman danger. The Roman empire was a deliberate mosaic of cultures and populations only lightly assimilated into any common language or system of values. Romans had long distinguished themselves from the Greeks—rightly or wrongly—because their power emerged out of the absorption of diverse “other” peoples into the Roman state. As a consequence of that power, Romans delighted in the danger of the exotic, imported into the city and made legible by a cultural economy of signs. By gazing upon the others whom they had conquered, whom they now knew so perfectly, Romans were looking at their own power and authority.⁴² Even when Romans imagined the failure of legible identities—as in an ancient novel like the *Aithiopika*, in which an Ethiopian princess is born with inexplicably white skin—they also imagine the ways in which false identities are ultimately pierced by knowing and authoritative viewers.⁴³ Roman elites did not construe themselves as dupes, but rather as master-gazers, ensuring that the optical economy of power remained intact.

Of course, this very certainty of the gaze necessitates its opposite: the fear of deception, the unrecognized pass, the undermining of the political economy. Elaine Ginsberg writes that

passing is about identities: their creation or imposition, their adoption or rejection, their accompanying rewards or penalties. Passing is also about the

boundaries established between identity categories and about the individual and cultural anxieties induced by boundary crossing. Finally, passing is about specularity: the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen.⁴⁴

So, too, Christians, gazing upon Christ's body, seeing its Jewishness, and seeing *through* its Jewishness, are operating from within a precarious political economy, fraught with anxiety.

I do not mean to reduce Christology to politics but, rather, to remind us that in this ancient context politics and the sacred cannot be disentangled. Sacrifice, too, was a political act, mapping mundane human relations of power and affection into the celestial sphere.⁴⁵ Sacrifice was also in many ways about specularity, boundaries, and "things seen and unseen." And, like the Roman politics of identity, sacrifice engendered a well-defined—and therefore precarious—political economy.

Christianity relied on this sacrificial economy, even as it challenged its workings. The crucifixion was a *skandalon* because it rearranged sacrificial politics: the subject of sacrifice (God) was also the sacrificial victim. Christians taught that Jesus conquered death by dying: the crucifixion both reifies the boundary between life and death and perforates it. This is the narrative logic of passing, of boundaries established and crossed. So, too, Jesus sacrificed himself (in these Christians' eyes) to Judaism, thereby reifying Judaism as a thing to be ultimately conquered and repudiated.

Ambrose, like Tertullian centuries earlier, paired these two sacrificial moments—circumcision and crucifixion—in a letter concerning Christ's circumcision:

[Christ] was circumcised first according to the Law, in order not to dissolve the Law [*ne legem solveret*]; afterward [he was circumcised] through the cross, so that he might fulfill the Law [see Matt 5:17]. Therefore that which was partial ceased, since perfection has come; for in Christ the cross has circumcised not one member, but the superfluous desires of the whole body.⁴⁶

Ambrose's circumcising cross is a powerful image of Christian theological and political superiority, and anxiety. It is a supercircumcision: the mark of Judaism now covers the whole body (*totius corporis*), and not only Jesus' contingently Jewish body, but the resolutely non-Jewish bodies of his followers. Both circumcision and crucifixion invert meaning: Just as Jesus' crucifixion brings life, and not death, so his circumcision brings Christianity ("perfection"), not Judaism. The power of these sacrifices is to pass through death to life, and through Judaism to Christianity.

Of all the various Christians who contemplated Jesus' passing, only one pushed back against this specular play on the body of Christ. For Augustine, bishop of Hippo Regius, the surface of Christ's body and its interior must reveal the same person no matter what the consequences. In his protracted debates with Jerome, with bitter accusations of "judaizing" flying across the Mediterranean, Augustine held a strict line on the Jewish observance of the apostles and Jesus:

Nor, moreover, do I think that the Lord himself was insincerely [*fallaciter*] circumcised by his parents. Perhaps someone might object on account of his age. Well, I don't think that he insincerely [*fallaciter*] said to the leper [. . .]: "Go and offer for yourself a sacrifice because Moses commanded it as a covenant for them" [Mark 1:44]. Nor did he go up insincerely [*fallaciter*] on the festival day, since he wasn't showing off for other people: rather, he went up secretly, not openly [John 7:10].⁴⁷

Augustine refuses to imagine Jesus acting *fallaciter*, "falsely" or "insincerely." Jesus' circumcision cannot be a ruse to pass among Jews, it must rather be a sincere gesture of faith in the Jewish covenant.⁴⁸ Of course, Augustine asserts here and elsewhere that Jesus rendered the Jewish sacraments moot;⁴⁹ but in his time, in his life, on his body, they were real, and they signified an interior state that matched the exterior appearance. Augustine displays, throughout his life, an acute anxiety over signs and their meanings, seeking stability and fixity where others enjoyed variety and diversity.⁵⁰ He also famously mistrusts human perception, making popular the innovative idea that the human will has been so twisted by sin that it can never, on its own, correctly perceive God.⁵¹

For late-ancient Christians, Jesus' passing models sovereign power over the categories of Jew and Christian, orthodox and heretic, living and dead. To traverse those boundaries is an act of *bravura*, a sacrifice that leads to impossible triumph; moreover, passing does not merely sacrifice a piece of the self, some drops of blood and pieces of flesh, but rather risks sacrificing the very idea of selfhood. Literary critic Marion Rust comments, in a psychoanalytic vein, "passing is merely one more indication that subjectivity involves fracture—that no true self exists apart from its multiple, simultaneous enactments."⁵² Augustine, writing on the edge of an empire, on the hinge of history as the barbarians truly began to break in and Roman and orthodox Christian power disintegrated, feared precisely such a loss of self. He points us away from the early Christian era, to the foreclosing of horizons that we will call the middle ages.

Notes

Many thanks to the participants of the Boston University conference at which this chapter was first presented as a paper: particular thanks to the organizers, Zsuzsanna Várhelyi and Jennifer Wright Knust, and the respondent to my paper, Ross Shepard Kraemer.

1. Tert., *De carne Christi* 5.4 (SC 216:228). All translations throughout this essay are my own.

2. Tert., *De carne Christi* 5.1 (SC 216:226). See now Jennifer Glancy, "The Law of the Opened Body: Tertullian on the Nativity," *Henoch* 30 (2008): 45–66, who perceptively demonstrates that Tertullian adopts an almost Marcionite disgust for the body in order to elevate the significance of Christ's incarnation.

3. Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 55.

4. Tert., *De carne Christi* 1.3 (SC 216:212): *nec caro sine nativitate*.

5. See the salutary warnings of Willamien Otten, "Christ's Birth of a Virgin Who Became a Wife: Flesh and Speech in Tertullian's *De Carne Christi*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997): 247–60, concerning the prior failures of rhetorical analysis to adequately address Tertullian's theology; but see also the rhetorico-theological analyses of Geoffrey Dunn, "Mary's Virginité in *partu* and Tertullian's Anti-Docetism in *De carne Christi* Reconsidered," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 58 (2007): 467–84, and Dunn's direct response to Otten's criticisms of rhetorical analysis in his "Rhetoric and Tertullian's *de virginibus velandis*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 59 (2005): 1–30.

6. Guy G. Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity*, translated by Susan Emanuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 72.

7. Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

8. Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

9. Carlin Barton, "The Emotional Economy of Sacrifice and Execution in Ancient Rome," *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 29 (2003): 341–60.

10. We can think of persistent figures such as Lucretia, whose memory creates a bright thread through this "emotional economy" from Livy to Augustine: see Dennis Trout, "Re-Textualizing Lucretia: Cultural Subversion in the *City of God*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994): 53–70.

11. Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 67.7; text in *Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone*, edited by Miroslav Marcovich, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 47 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 186. On this passage, see my "Dialogical Differences: (De-)Judaizing Jesus' Circumcision," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 15 (2007): 291–335, at 298–304.

12. As a literary phenomenon, "passing" already appears in the 1853 novel by William Wells Brown (a former slave) entitled *Clotel, or the President's Daughter*, and other midcentury fiction (as well as ambiguous memoirs). Sometimes "the pass" is central to the plot, sometimes one of many complicating factors, as the passing of the slave Eliza as a white man in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; see Julia Stern, "Spanish Masquerade and the Drama of Racial Identity in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," in *Passing and the Fiction of Identity*, edited by Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 103–30. Most recent studies of passing in novels focus on the twentieth century, especially Nella Larsen's 1929 novel *Passing*; see Catherine Rottenberg, "Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire," *Criticism* 45 (2003): 435–52.

13. One famous account of "passing" was of a white man as black: John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1961). See also the recent account of the late-nineteenth-century geologist (and inaugural head of the U.S. Geological Survey) Clarence King in Martha A. Sandweiss, *Passing Strange: A Gilded Age Tale of Love and Deception across the Color Line* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

14. Elaine K. Ginsberg, "Introduction: The Politics of Passing," in Ginsberg, *Passing*, 1–18: "By extension, 'passing' has been applied discursively to disguises of other elements of an individual's presumed 'natural' or 'essential' identity, including class, ethnicity, and sexuality, as well as gender, the latter usually effected by deliberate alterations of physical appearance and behavior, including cross-dressing" (3). See also Valerie Rohy, "Displacing Desire: Passing, Nostalgia, and *Giovanni's Room*," in Ginsberg, *Passing*, 218–33, who

discusses passing on the “axis of sexuality”; and Gayle Freda Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

15. One of many felicitous phrases from Amy Robinson, “It Takes One to Know One: Passing and Communities of Common Interest,” *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994): 715–36, at 719.

16. Robinson, “It Takes One,” 720.

17. Adrian Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black,” *Transition* 58 (1992): 4–32; this essay has been reprinted multiple times, including in Piper’s own collected works: *Out of Order, Out of Sight*, vol. 1, *Selected Writings in Meta-Art, 1968–1992* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 275–307.

18. I’m speaking here of narrative accounts of passing, in which the audience at some point (and often characters within the story) pierce the disguise of the passing character. It is true, though, that even in real-world accounts of “passing,” in which a person *consciously* “passes,” there is a sense of essential identities at play even as they are disrupted.

19. Ginsberg, “Introduction: The Politics of Passing,” 4.

20. Rohy, “Displacing Desire,” 226.

21. It is worth noting recent, postmodern attempts to appropriate the concept of “passing” as a positive mode of performativity that works to undermine all essentialism: see, for example, Pamela L. Caughie, *Passing and Pedagogy: The Dynamics of Responsibility* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

22. On “docetism,” see Guy G. Stroumsa, “Christ’s Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered,” *JECS* 12 (2004): 267–88, and Ronnie Goldstein and Guy G. Stroumsa, “The Greek and Jewish Origins of Docetism: A New Proposal,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 10 (2007): 423–41.

23. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98.

24. Tert., *Adv. Marcionem* 4.7. Text in *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem*, edited and translated by Ernest Evans, *Oxford Early Christian Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 2: 278.

25. One of our difficulties reconstructing Marcion’s beliefs, and “Marcionite Christianity,” is our reliance on his detractors to reconstruct his texts and beliefs. Tertullian, especially, has been employed to reconstruct Marcion’s “Bible.” Among others, see the recent overviews (and references) of Harry Y. Gamble, “Marcion and the ‘Canon,’” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 1: *Origins to Constantine*, edited by Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 195–213; Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, translated by Michael Steinhauser, edited by Marshall Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 241–56; and the essays in *Marcion und seine kirchengeschichtliche Wirkung*, edited by Gerhard May and Katharina Greschat, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 150 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002).

26. Tert., *Adv. Marcionem* 4.7 = Evans, *Tertullian*, 2:278.

27. Tert., *Adv. Marcionem* 4.7 = Evans, *Tertullian*, 2:278.

28. Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundam Lucam* 2.55 (CCL 14:54).

29. Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundam Lucam* 4.6 (CCL 14:107).

30. On Ambrose’s literary production of orthodoxy, see the original thoughts of Virginia Burrus, “*Begotten, Not Made*”: *Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity*, *Figurae*:

Reading Medieval Culture (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 134–83. On Ambrose's anti-Judaism, particularly his forceful social division of Jews and Christians in the later fourth century, see n. 32 below.

31. Maximus of Turin, *Homilia* 35 (= *homilia* 7 de baptismo Christi) (PL 57:299). See also the earlier hymnography of Ephrem in Syriac, who proposes similar rationales for Jesus' circumcision in his hymns *On the Lord* and *On the Crucifixion*, on which see Christine Shephardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria*, Patristic Monograph Series (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2008), 102–103.

32. Ambrose famously decried the public rights of Jews in his confrontation over the destruction of the synagogue in Callinicum; for discussion, see Neil McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 22 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 298–308. Tertullian, of course, wrote a treatise *Adversus Iudaeos* which, interestingly, used much of the same material found in sections of his *Adversus Marcionem*; see brief discussion in Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian, Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2004), 47–51 and 63–68. A partial treatise by Maximus of Turin *adversus Iudaeos* survives, as well (PL 57:739–806).

33. On the heuristic problems with this term, see now Daniel Boyarin, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to Which Is Appended a Correction of My Border Lines),” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009): 7–36.

34. Epiph., *Panarion* 30.26 (GCS 25:368).

35. Epiph., *Panarion* 30.28 (GCS 25:371).

36. Epiph., *Panarion* 30.28 (GCS 25:372).

37. See, for example, Ambrose, *Ep.* 72.23 (PL 16:1249); Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarii in Lucam* (*homilia* 3 = *Homiliae* 12 diversae) (PG 77:1041).

38. On the discursive reflexivity of late ancient and Byzantine heresiologists (including, and preeminently, Epiphanius), see Averil Cameron, “Jews and Heretics—A Category Error?” in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, edited by Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam H. Becker, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 96 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 345–60; and Averil Cameron, “How to Read Heresiology,” in *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, edited by Dale B. Martin and Patricia Cox Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 193–212.

39. For a similar reading of Epiphanius, repressing theological desires through description of a heresy, see the analysis of Mary veneration by Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Epiphanius of Salamis, the Kollyridians, and the Early Dormition Narratives: The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century,” *JECS* 16 (2008): 371–401.

40. Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyra in Exodum* 1.7 (PG 69:404–5). The *Glaphyra*, a commentary on the Pentateuch, comes from early in Cyril's career; the *Commentarius in Lucam* probably originated later in his episcopate as homilies, and was edited together.

41. Cyril, *Commentarius in Lucam* (*in catena*) (PG 72:499–500).

42. See, among other recent studies, Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf, “Cosmopolis: Rome as World City,” in *Rome the Cosmopolis*, edited by Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1–20, and Christopher Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

43. Previous studies that have used the concept of “passing” to decode the logics of late Roman texts also suggest this. See Judith Perkins, “An Ancient ‘Passing’ Novel: Heliodorus’ *Aithiopika*,” *Arethusa* 32 (1999): 197–214, on the *Aithiopika*; Virginia Burrus, “Mimicking Virgins: Colonial Ambivalence and the Ancient Romance,” *Arethusa* 38 (2005): 49–88, at 82–83; and Rebecca Lyman, “The Politics of Passing: Justin Martyr’s Conversion as a Problem of ‘Hellenization,’” in *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing*, edited by Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton, Studies in Comparative History (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 36–60.

44. Ginsberg, “Introduction: The Politics of Passing,” 2.

45. See the thoughtful overview of Roman sacrifice in Jörg Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, translated by Richard Gordon (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 137–53, as well as the many chapters in this volume.

46. Ambrose, *Ep.* 78.2 (PL 16:1268).

47. Augustine, *Ep.* 82.18 (PL 33:283).

48. On Augustine’s perhaps idiosyncratic (but nonetheless influential) view of Judaism and Jewish practice, see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

49. See, for example, his discussion in Augustine, *Ep.* 23.4 (PL 33:97). The context is a discussion of baptism in response to Donatist purists; interestingly, Augustine notes that, just as after Jesus’ first coming the *sacramentum* of circumcision was “set aside,” so too will baptism be “set aside” after his second coming.

50. See Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

51. James J. O’Donnell describes original sin as Augustine’s “most original and nearly single-handed creation”: *Augustine: A New Biography* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005), 296.

52. Marion Rust, “The Subaltern as Imperialist: Speaking of Olaudah Equiano,” in Ginsberg, *Passing*, 21–36, at 35.